

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00278 161528Z
ACTION EUR-12

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UNCLAS QUEBEC 0278

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: CLAUDE CASTONGUAY RESIGNS AS HEAD OF PRE-REFERENDUM
COMMITTEE

1. HIGHLY RESPECTED FORMER LIBERAL MINISTER, CLAUDE CASTONGUAY, HAS CONFIRMED PRESS REPORTS THAT HE WILL RESIGN AS THE HEAD OF THE FEDERALIST PRE-REFERENDUM COMMITTEE EFFECTIVE AUGUST 25. CASTONGUAY SAID IN HIS LETTER OF RESIGNATION THAT HE WAS STEPPING DOWN BECAUSE HE HAD INSUFFICIENT TIME TO DEVOTE TO THIS BUSINESS RESPONSIBILITIES. CASTONGUAY IS PRESIDENT OF THE LAURENTIAN FUND, AND CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF IMPERIAL LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY OF TORONTO.

2. COMMENT: CASTONGUAY'S TENURE AT THE PRE-REFERENDUM COMMITTEE, WHICH IS MADE UP OF REPRESENTATIVES OF SEVEN POLITICAL PARTIES AND SEVEN NATIONAL UNITY GROUPS, WAS MARRED EARLIER THIS YEAR BY AN ANGRY DISPUTE OVER WHETHER THE QUEBEC-CANADA GROUP SHOULD ACCEPT FUNDING DIRECTLY FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. WE ARE INCLINED, HOWEVER, TO ACCEPT AT FACE VALUE CASTONGUAY'S EXPLANATION THAT HE WAS RESIGNING BECAUSE OF BUSINESS PRESSURES. A SENIOR OFFICIAL OF IMPERIAL LIFE TOLD ME EARLIER THIS YEAR, SHORTLY AFTER CASTONGUAY HAD TAKEN ON THE PRE-REFERENDUM
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COMMITTEE JOB, THAT HE WAS DISTURBED THAT CASTONGUAY MIGHT HAVE INSUFFICIENT TIME FOR HIS RESPONSIBILITIES AT IMPERIAL LIFE AND THE LAURENTIAN. SINCE THEN, IT HAS BECOME CLEAR THAT RECONCILING THE OFTEN FRACTIOUS MEMBERS OF THE PRE-REFERENDUM COMMITTEE IS VIRTUALLY A FULL-TIME JOB LEAVING LITTLE TIME FOR OTHER MATTERS.

3. SO FAR, WE HAVE NO INDICATION AS TO WHOM WILL REPLACE
CASTONGUAY. THERE HAS BEEN SOME PRESS SPECULATION THAT LEADING
CANDIDATE AT THE MOMENT IS MICHEL ROBERT, CURRENTLY HEAD OF
THE PROVINCIAL LIBERAL PARTYS POLICY COMMITTEE. MCNAMARA

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